

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM USLO PEKING

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4992

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY LISBON

C O N F I D E N T I A L PEKING 0042

NOFORN

E.O.11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR CH PT ID

SUBJECT: PRC ATTITUDE ON PORTUGUESE TIMOR

1. SUMMARY: AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY HAS PASSED US REPORT OF AMBASSADOR FIGZGERALD'S JANUARY 5 CALL ON PRC FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL TO DISCUSS PORTUGUESE TIMOR. OFFICIAL SAID PRC HAD INVITED FRETILIN DELEGATION TO "INFORM ITSELF (PRC) OF THE SITUATION" IN EAST TIMOR, EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR FRETILIN, BUT IMPLIED THAT PRC DE JURE RECOGNITION WAS IMPRACTICABLE. HE DID NOT INDICATE WHETHER OR NOT THE PRC PLANNED TO GIVE THE FRETILIN MILITARY AID. END SUMMARY. TEXT AUSTRALIAN CABLE FOLLOWS:

2. QUOTE:

3. CHENG STATED THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO CHANGE IN CHINESE POLICY WHICH HAD BEEN OUTLINED IN SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE. HE REPEATED RESERVATIONS ABOUT USEFULNESS OF APPOINTMENT OF SECRETARY-GENERAL'S REPRESENTATIVE. CHENG SAID THAT CHINA'S CHIEF AIM IN RECEIVING FRETILIN DELEGATION HAD BEEN TO INFORM ITSELF OF THE SITUATION.

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HITHERTO CHINA HAD HAD NO CONTACT WITH EAST TIMOR OR ANY OF ITS

POLITICAL PARTIES AND HAD ACCORDINGLY GIVEN HIGH LEVEL RECEPTION TO THIS INITIAL VISIT WHICH HAD BEEN ARRANGED AT REQUEST OF FRETILIN. THE VISIT HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL. HE ADDED THAT DELEGATION WAS NOW IN DPRK AND WOULD ALSO VISIT HANOI. CHENG ACKNOWLEDGED THAT RECEPTION OF THE FRETILIN DELEGATION BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER COULD BE CONSTRUED AS DE FACTO RECOGNITION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE "DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF EAST TIMOR", BUT IMPLIED THAT BECAUSE OF THE INTERNAL SITUATION IN TIMOR, WHICH AMOUNTED TO VIRTUAL OCCUPATION BY INDONESIA, DE JURE RECOGNITION WAS IMPRACTICABLE.

4. ELABORATING CHINESE REASONS FOR SUPPORT OF FRETILIN, CHENG SAID THAT FRETILIN ADVOCATED INDEPENDENCE FOR EAST TIMOR, WAS COMPARATIVELY ADVANCED (ADVOCATING REFORMS IN LAND TENURE AND EDUCATION) AND ALSO ENJOYED THE POPULAR SUPPORT AND OTHER PARTIES WERE OF NO ACCOUNT.

5. I ENDEAVORED TO DRAW FROM CHENG ANY INDICATION WHETHER FRETILIN HAD SOUGHT OR BEEN GRANTED ASSISTANCE, PARTICULARLY MILITARY ASSISTANCE. CHENG STATED THAT CHINA'S POLICY OF SUPPORT FOR POPULAR INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS WAS GROUNDED IN PRINCIPLE AND WAS WELL-KNOWN BUT ADDED THAT IT WAS SOMETIMES INCONVENIENT TO DISCUSS WITH THIRD PARTIES THE COMPLEXITIES INVOLVED IN BILATERAL RELATIONS. CHENG SAID THAT IF THE INDONESIANS WITHDREW, CHINA WOULD CONTINUE TO SUPPORT FRETILIN. IF THEY REMAINED IT WAS DIFFICULT TO SAY ALTHOUGH THE PEOPLE COULD BE EXPECTED TO PERSIST IN HEROIC STRUGGLE AGAINST THE AGGRESSOR.

6. I SUGGESTED THAT THE VIEWS OF OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS HAD MUCH IN COMMON PARTICULARLY OPPOSITION TO ARMED INTERVENTION, ALTHOUGH DIFFERENCES EXISTED. WE WERE CONCERNED AT THE POSSIBLE ADVERSE REACTIONS AMONG COUNTRIES OF SOUTH EAST ASIA TO ANY SUSPICION OF MATERIAL, ESPECIALLY MILITARY, ASSISTANCE FROM CHINA. INDONESIA HAD BEEN APPREHENSIVE ABOUT OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE AND POSSIBLE THREAT TO ITS OWN STABILITY AND SECURITY. CHINESE ASSISTANCE TO FRETILIN COULD BE CITED BY INDONESIA AS VINDICATION OF ITS ACTION. I ASKED IF CHINA HAD CONSIDERED THE POSITION OF THE USSR IN THIS SOVIET UNION TO A MORE ACTIVE INTEREST IN INDONESIAN AFFAIRS INIMICAL TO CHINA'S INTEREST. CHENG RESPONDED THAT AUSTRALIA SHOULD EXERT ITS UTMOST INFLUENCE TO SECURE THE WITHDRAWAL OF INDONESIAN TROOPS AND ALLOW FOR PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT.

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7. (AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY) COMMENT:
THE PRESENT CHINESE STAND SEEMS DICTATED BY THE MORAL IMPERATIVE THAT INDONESIA SHOULD BE CONDEMNED FOR OPEN AGGRESSION, WHERE PREVIOUSLY CHINA HAD NO WISH OR INTENTION OF BECOMING INVOLVED. ONCE THE INDONESIAN INVASION FORCED THEM, RELUCTANTLY, TO TAKE A STAND AND ISSUE STATEMENTS, FRETILIN WAS APPARENTLY THE INDIGENOUS PARTY MOST EASILY IDENTIFIED WITH, AS IT ALLOWED CONSISTENCY WITH THEIR

OWN POLICIES. SILENCE MIGHT HAVE BEEN CONSTRUED AS CONDONEMENT OF THE USE OF FORCE IN THE SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR MANY COUNTRIES IN DISPUTE WITH CHINA. FAILURE OF INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT TO NORMALISE ITS RELATIONS WITH CHINA AND CONSTANT ASSERTION BY INDONESIA THAT IT IS CHINA THAT INTERFERES IN THE AFFAIRS OF SEA COUNTRIES HAS PROBABLY EXACERBATED CHINESE FEELINGS. CHINA'S WISH FOR AN INDEPENDENT EAST TIMOR SEEMS MUCH MORE DETERMINED NOW THAT IT WAS TWO MONTHS AGO.

8. THE CHINESE NOW SEEM COMMITTED TO THE CONCEPT OF INDEPENDENCE FOR EAST TIMOR, TO FRETILIN AS THE "PROGRESSIVE" PARTY PURSUING THAT GOAL AND TO SUPPORT OF FRETILIN CONSISTENT WITH CHINA'S SUPPORT OF OTHER INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH EAST ASIA. THE FRETILIN DELEGATION'S CALL ON CH'EN HAI-LIEN, AND VISIT TO A PLA UNIT AS WELL AS CHENG'S HEDGING WITH ME ON THE QUESTION OF MILITARY AID LEADS TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE CHINESE ARE CONTEMPLATING MATERIAL ASSISTANCE. I THINK THEY ARE AS YET UNDECIDED ON THE FORM AND LEVEL OF SUCH ASSISTANCE WITH CH'IAO KUAN-HUA'S REMARKS AT THE WELCOMING BANQUET ON 29 DECEMBER THAT "THE EAST TIMORESE PEOPLE...WOULD SURELY WIN THE FINAL VICTORY OF NATIONAL

INDEPENDENCE SO LONG AS THEY PRESERVE IN SELF-RELIANCE AND HARD STRUGGLE..." INDICATE THAT THEY WOULD PROBABLY PREFER TO GO WITHOUT ANY ASSISTANCE BEYOND "FIRING EMPTY CANNON" IF THEY CAN. END QUOTE THAYER

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